



Hilaire du Berrier: Spy From North Dakota

Text and Photograph by James P. Lucier

The boy who was raised on the American prairie became the confidant of kings, and lived a life of incredible adventure. And after nearly a century of work he calmly looks to the future.

Hilaire du Berrier is a pioneer aviator, daredevil, adventurer, writer, monarchist and spy who has seen more of this century than most of the rest of us and experienced it more deeply. What is more, he still is at work, looking forward toward the millennium.

He was born of fifth-generation Huguenot parents in 1906 at Flasher, N.D., in what was then and is now a tiny town on the prairie (pop. 300). A friend of his father was old Albert Wind-Did-Blow, whose squaw put a new pair of beaded moccasins on the tiny feet of this first white baby born in the county while uttering a prayer that the papoose would grow up to be a great warrior. His parents gave him the name Harold, which he hated and shortened to Hal. Always a contrary child, Hal du Berrier was shipped off to military school at the tender age of 11 to get straightened out, lasting until a month before graduation.

It was the beginning of the Age of Flight, and du Berrier desperately wanted to go to flying school. Instead, his mother sent him to study art. He worked as a commercial artist for a while in Chicago, but at the age of 20 he threw it all over and ran away with the circus — a flying circus.

Barnstorming around the United States, du Berrier learned how to do the loop-the-loop in a biplane before learning how to land, walked on the wings, jumped from one plane to another and hung by his toes from a rope ladder. He started his own "Du Berrier's Flying Circus." But in the end it was too tame, too much of the same-old

same-old. What he wanted was action.

When his uncle was appointed as the U.S. representative to a commission in Paris, Hal jumped at the chance to go along for three months. In France, the

bureaucrats said it would be illegal to register someone named "Hal," because the name wasn't on the official roster of saints. They agreed that St. Hilaire, the name of one of Napoleon's generals, would be the closest legal match, with the appropriate saintly cachet. Now

Hilaire du Berrier, he didn't return to the United States for 16 years.

While in Paris, he learned that the Emperor Haile Selassie needed a few good men, especially aviators, to stave off the impending invasion of the Mussolini war machine. By now the transplanted American had become a committed monarchist, responsive to the call of gallantry and honor. The emperor's army and air force (four planes) were no match for the mighty Italian juggernaut, and in 1936 du Berrier found himself in an Italian truck being driven into Addis Abba, Ethiopia, as a prisoner of war. But he was in luck. The Italian newsreel propagandists couldn't get the camera shots quite right, and the victorious forces had to reenter the capital three times, celebrating over and over until the film was in the can. In the hubbub, du Berrier escaped on the overnight train to Djibouti.

Returning to Europe, he was relaxing at the castle of Baron Banffy at Cluj, Transylvania, when he read in a newspaper that Spanish military forces under Gen. Sanjuro

He wanted was to get some action.

Personal Bio



Du Berrier: Nov. 1, 1942, five days before being captured by the Japanese.

Born: Flasher, N.D., Nov. 1, 1906.

Profession: Journalist, Soldier of Honor.

Politics: Monarchist.

Home: Monaco.

Author: *Background to Betrayal*, 1963; *L'Echec Americain au Vietnam Vu Par un Americain*; *The Spy from North Dakota* (in process).

Daughter: Jeannette, a registered nurse in Massachusetts.

Hero: "Each year I celebrate Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Austerlitz on Dec. 2. When I was in prison camp, a lot of my mates were sailors. I started telling them stories about Napoleon and, within a month, I converted them all."

Favorite reading: The 11th Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1912 — the last edition published in England. "When I was running my spy ring I had plenty of time on my hands, so I read all 30 volumes."

were organizing to restore his hero, King Alfonso XIII, to the Spanish throne. Arriving in Spain on the ubiquitous overnight train, he promptly ran into a grave personal defect in his situation. Gen. Francisco Franco, the commander in chief, desperate for aid, had accepted assistance and advisers from the Italian army. Alas, the Italians had escaped-prisoner du Berrier on their bad list. Spurned, he decided to do his bit for the king as a spy by signing up for the Communist (or so-called Loyalist) side. During the period of his one-month contract, he flew missions while making extensive notes of the types and quality of the aircraft supplied by the Soviet Union, secrets he intended to publish afterward in newspaper articles—and did. Unfortunately, he was denounced by U.S. Communists fighting on the Loyalist side, and was taken out to be shot. But when his name was called, higher officers decided that it would be bad form to shoot an American, since it might offend Eleanor Roosevelt and other U.S. patrons of the Communist forces. He was allowed to escape on the overnight train.

For a while du Berrier was a familiar sight in the cafés of Paris, sporting spats, cane and monocle, seen in the company of other expatriates such as Ernest Hemingway, Man Ray, Louise Bryant and Kiki of Montparnasse, and writing for the French newspapers. Then one of his flyboy buddies came with the news that there was going to be a “show” out in Asia, and he hastened there to fly for Chiang Kai-shek.

There was much to do in China, and soon du Berrier was in Japanese-occupied Shanghai running a Nationalist spy ring making covert radio transmissions to Chungking twice a day. To protect himself, he allied and trained with a supersecret alternative wing of French intelligence, a unit directed by Gen. Raul Salan, the *Renseignement Guerre Numero Un*. Du Berrier set the ring up in a large house in the French quarter of Shanghai and to cut expenses rented out a room on the first floor to an actress estranged from her husband. One day the actress disappeared, fled to the north, married Mao Tse-tung and became better known as Jiang Qin.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the French spirited away du Berrier's radio and incriminating papers, but his position became more tenuous every day. Finally, the sound of heavy boots came on the stairway in the night and he was hauled

away as a spy. Japanese interrogators took him to their torture chamber to make him identify the members of his spy ring. He never broke, but the torture left his face partially paralyzed, and ended his flying days.

After five years in a Japanese prison camp near the River Kwai, he was liberated by advance forces of the American O.S.S. The Chinese Nationalists gave him a special citation. The French decorated him with the *Croix de Combattant Volontaire* and the *Croix de Combattant de la Resistance* and, years later, awarded him a military pension. Leftists in the U.S. State Department, however, spent years dunning him for \$600 for food the U.S. government supplied through the Swiss Embassy while he was starving in the Japanese camp and denied him a passport until the bill was paid.

Eventually returning to Paris, du Berrier fell in again with his pals in French intelligence circles. It was a critical moment. Salan and Jacques Soustelle, then the top intel chief, first maneuvered Gen. Charles de Gaulle into power to save Algeria as a part of France and then tried to overthrow him when he moved to turn the country over to Ahmed Ben Bella and the Algerian terrorists. Salan and Soustelle went into hiding, and du Berrier performed critical services for them in raising funds and serving as a courier to their hideouts. When the coup plotters were arrested, du Berrier scurried back to the United States but finally settled in Monaco, where he has lived and written ever since—publishing a monthly intelligence newsletter with subscribers all over the world (HduB Reports, 20 Blvd. Princesse Charlotte, Monte Carlo, Monaco; \$75 the year).

Du Berrier was an adviser and friend to the Emperor Bao Dai, the exiled Vietnamese leader then living in a small house in nearby Cannes. France had gone through the agony of Algeria only to enter the agony of Vietnam. In 1963, du Berrier published the most important alternative history of the Vietnam war, *Background to Betrayal*, a book that received worldwide attention. Writing from his detailed experience, he denounced leftists in the U.S. government for supporting first Ho Chi Minh and later Ngo Dinh Diem, preparing the way for the Communist takeover of Vietnam.

Insight found du Berrier recently in his spacious modern apartment in Monaco sitting before a large bay window overlooking the famed casino, the palm trees

and the sparkling blue Mediterranean. His desk is covered with files not just about the past but about the new Amsterdam Treaty, Ken Starr and the latest economic reports. Here, too, he is writing his memoirs on a computer that the boy from Flasher never could have imagined.

Insight: You proudly call yourself a nationalist, a monarchist and an American. Yet few men could claim to have a broader experience in international events than you. How did you become a monarchist?

Hilaire du Berrier: When I was 9 years old I was given a book on Napoleon's cavalry, and my mind was made up. One of the first things I did when I came to Paris was to join the French monarchist party.

I think that one of the most sublime speeches a head of state ever made was the reply that King Alphonso XIII gave to the men from Madrid who came to ask him to abdicate. His Majesty was in the Maurice Hotel in Paris, heard them through and when they were finished he stood up, addressed them and said: “You have asked me to abdicate. But abdicate I cannot. For I am not only the King of Spain, but I am the King of all the Spaniards. And I not only have my own reign, but those of my family who have gone before me, for which I must someday give a rigorous accounting.”

I was walking in the Rue de Rivoli one day, and there was a tall man approaching. I recognized him, and I tipped my hat. He tipped his hat. It was Alphonso. After that I would have followed him anywhere.

Insight: What does that mean to us as we enter the 21st century?

HduB: Did you ever read [Oswald] Spengler? He put it this way: “Tradition is cosmic force at its highest energy.” And he said, “Modern man rejects everything he does not understand and destroys with an epigram institutions reared by the inarticulate wisdom of the centuries.”

Insight: In a life filled with adventure, what was your most critical point?

HduB: I was in Shanghai in 1941, and I was still running my spy ring. One morning I was awakened by a telephone call from John, my No. 1 Chinese agent. He said, “You'd better get out. The Japanese have just declared war on America.” I said, “You're crazy, John, it's just another Chinese rumor.” I went back to bed, but the noises in the street didn't sound right to me, so I got up and looked out the dormer window.

As far as I could see were trucks, unload-

ing the Japanese naval landing party — blue-uniformed Navy men who looked like toy soldiers, each the same height, each with the same wooden expression. One group was putting sandbags on the streets at intersections. Others were drawing a rope across the street so that they could paralyze traffic if the siren sounded. And I sat down on the edge of my bed, thinking about the gravity of the situation: me with a transmitter and receiver in my place, me running this ring and at the same time being paid a retainer by Chiang's general.

I called Capt. Reseau Mingant, my No. 1 in the French service, and I said, "What'll I do?" He said, "Don't worry, it will take them two or three days to get settled. We'll take care of that radio later in the day." He came in a car flying the French flag and took away the transmitter. But there was only one thing that neither the French nor I had thought of: France was neutral then and the Japanese couldn't torture a Frenchman, but if they found out that an American was in the French resistance they could try to torture the names out of him. And that's what caused my paralyzed face.

Now you have heard about men under pressure. I was under pressure all those years — 1939, 1940, 1941 — when the Japanese eyes and ears were all over, looking for that transmitter and receiver. And I was as cool as a cucumber, just like when I was hanging by my toes on the plane — thinking nothing could happen.

Nov. 1, 1942, was my birthday, and a friend had a birthday party for me. I was thinking, Cool! Perfectly secure! But not five days later I was hearing steps coming up the stairway just before dawn — heavy boots — and I knew the game was up. I was taken to a POW camp and, after about six months the men from the Kampeitai, the secret police, came and took me away to the torture house. I was in a cage. And day after day, between sessions, I would sit on the concrete floor and look at my shoes — they had taken my shoelaces — and I would ask my feet how they brought me there.

Insight: Your unique experience has given you a deep power of analysis. What do you see as the future of Europe?

HduB: Well, on the first of January Europeans are supposed to get the euro, and lose their national currencies. When the pro-

ponents of European integration first set up that European movement at the end of World War II, they told Europeans it was just a common market in order to drop trade barriers and eliminate customs duties. Then when they got the European countries in so far they couldn't back out, they told them it was to form a Republic of Europe — a country, a supnation, with a parliament in Strasbourg and Brussels and a central bank in Germany. Now they have gone so far that 11 nations are committed to this new money — and are being told that it is a political move and they are going to be governed by a central parliament.

The men who set it up did so in secret meetings in the U.S. Embassy in Paris



Hanging by his toes: HduB barnstorms in 1928.

shortly after the war. David K. Bruce was the American ambassador then, and his wife, Evangeline, in her memoirs said that she saw the European movement take shape before her eyes. She said, "It could have been done elsewhere, but it was done there, and one could actually see the idea crystallizing. The talks went on daily, and in the end they beat out what was really the original plan for the Common Market."

Dean Acheson from the United States and Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman from France did the planning. George Ball, an American, was a lawyer for Monnet. John Foster Dulles was part of it, too.

Insight: Will this supnation be a stronger entity or a weaker entity?

HduB: Well, these countries that have gone into it will see that their sovereignty is being taken over because the Parliament of Europe, this superstate Europe, is to take precedence over their native parliaments, laws and constitutions. So the once-inde-

pendent countries are becoming provinces.

The U.S. had its first example of what this will mean about two weeks ago when you had the trouble over the banana trade. The Europeans threatened to bring the United States before a European court if it insisted on letting South American bananas compete on equal footing with bananas coming from countries in the European Union's sphere of influence. So what you are going to see now is, after it gets tough, that the euro becomes the reserve currency for Europe as the dollar is the reserve currency now. Well, that's going to have an effect on the dollar. People will unload it. The European Union's trade rules and regulations are biased against America. In time you will hear voices raised that the United States must come in, too.

Insight: What is the view from Europe of what's happening in the United States?

HduB: In Europe everyone thinks that America is crazy, that any people who would elect Clinton and then reelect Clinton has lost all common sense. The United States is becoming more and more isolated. When the issue came up in the United Nations last month to censure [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu for expanding the settlements on the West Bank, only the United States, Israel and Micronesia voted against it. The Europeans feel that Americans

are bringing a war down on their heads.

But the Islamic war will not be a war of armies against armies. The Islamic anti-Israel coalition has no common front where they can fight Israel. The only thing they can do is to have Muslims attack Israel's friends. There are 15 million Muslims in the seven so-called Schengen treaty countries that agreed to open their borders, allowing militants to travel without restriction.

Insight: What's going to happen to the euro? Will it be a strong currency or will it cause a depression in Europe?

HduB: The best authorities in Europe are divided. Some say that it will cause trouble; some say that it will be so strong that it will cause loss of confidence in the pound sterling and the dollar. What this is going to do is to strike at tradition. At the very same time that Europe is hit in the solar plexus of its traditions, you are going to have the start of the Islamic war. Between the two, Europe is going to have a rough ride. ●